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ABSTRACT

The impact of adult models on the moralities of seventy-two 5- to 7-year-old boys was assessed in this study. Each subject was exposed to a televised adult model and was then administered tests of moral behavior (resistance to deviation in a laboratory situation), moral choice (in a hypothetical situation) and moral judgment level (on an intentionality scale). Boys exposed to a model who said he would resist deviating from a prohibition and who supported this statement with a morally immature justification (based on reward/punishment) were subsequently more likely to use that model's statements to guide their own moral behavior and moral choice than were boys exposed to a model advocating resistance to deviation with a morally mature justification (based on reciprocity). Immature models expressing a deviating moral choice led to more deviating moral decisions in observers than did mature deviating models. The moral judgment levels of the subjects were not significantly affected by the models. The subjects' moral behavior was predictive of their moral choice while moral judgment level was not significantly related to the other two indices of morality. (Author/MP)

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The Effect of Modeled Rationales on Moral Behavior, Moral Choice, and Level of Moral Judgment in Children

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Abstract

Five- to seven-year-old boys were exposed to televised adult models and were then administered tests of resistance to deviation (moral behavior), moral choice, and moral judgment level. Boys exposed to a model who said he would resist deviating from a prohibition and who supported this statement with a morally realistic justification were subsequently more likely to use that model's statements to guide their own moral behavior and moral choice than were boys exposed to a model advocating resistance to deviation with a morally autonomous justification. Realistic models expressing a deviating moral choice led to more deviating moral decisions in observers than did autonomous deviating models. The moral judgment levels of the subjects were not significantly affected by the models. The subjects' moral behavior was predictive of their moral choice while moral judgment level was not significantly related to the other two indices of morality.

The Effect of Modeled Rationales on Moral Behavior, Moral Choice and Level of Moral Judgment in Children

The development of the child's ability to deal with right and wrong continues to be the focus of intense theoretical and empirical interest. Social learning theorists have continued to study the personal and situation variables that influence the way the unsupervised child behaves when actually confronted with "right" and "wrong" behavioral choices. Cognitive-developmental theorists continue to document the maturation of moral opinions (choice) concerning proper behavior in hypothetical moral conflict situations and the use of moral justifications by the child. Rarely have these three indices or morality (behavior, choice and judgment level) been studied within the same research project.

A considerable amount of past research has been directed at the issue of the inter-relation between the various indices of morality in the child. While little support has been found for a significant relation between level of moral judgment and actual moral behavior in the child (e.g., Grinder 1964; Nelson, Grinder & Biaggio 1969; Santrock 1975), moral judgment and moral choice have often been confounded in past research efforts (e.g., Bandura & McDonald 1963; LeFurgy & Woloshin 1969). When presented with a hypothetical moral dilemma, the child was usually told to choose the most proper and/or least proper course of action. However, when the child chose either of the alternatives (moral choice), this choice usually necessitated the use of a particular level of moral judgment by the child

to justify his/her choice. Few studies have adequately avoided the confounding of moral choice and level of moral judgment (e.g., Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson 1969; Keasey 1973) and these studies suggest that moral choice, like moral behavior, is relatively independent of moral judgment level.

Finally, inconsistent relationships have been reported between the child's moral behavior and his/her moral choice about proper behavior in a similar though hypothetical situation (e.g., Medinnus 1966; Stein 1967). There is some evidence that children who decide to resist deviation when tempted are subsequently more severe in their attitudes toward deviation while children who fail to resist deviation express more leniency (Mills 1958). Further, though the choices were not moral ones, Rothman (1976) found a relation between actual choice behavior and hypothesized choice behavior in preadolescents.

All three indices of morality have been found to be susceptible to the influence of models. Regarding moral behavior, abundant research has demonstrated that the child's resistance to deviation can be increased or decreased by exposure to resisting or deviating behavioral models (e.g., Perry, Bussey, & Perry 1975; Rosenkoetter 1973; Stein, 1967; Toner, Parke, & Yussen 1978). Further, such a modeling effect has been found even when the models simply spoke of their past or proposed future rule-following or rule-breaking behavior (e.g., Allen & Liebert 1969; Stein & Bryan 1972; Wolf 1973; Wolf & Cheyne 1972).

The child's moral choice has also been found to modified by exposure

to models stating moral choices (e.g., Bandura & McDonald 1963; Brody & Henderson 1977; Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson 1969; Dorr & Fey 1974; Keasey 1973; LeFurgy & Woloshin 1969; Stein & Bryan 1972).

The influence of models on the child's moral judgment level has been a controversial issue in that, while social learning theory (e.g., Bandura & McDonald 1963) would predict that children could imitate either more sophisticated or less sophisticated moral reasoning than their own, cognitive developmental theory (e.g., LeFurgy & Woloshin 1969) would predict that the child would understand but not accept less sophisticated moral reasoning than his/her own and that the child would be impelled to imitate a level of moral reasoning that is somewhat more sophisticated than his own. While key research efforts on this issue have often been impaired by the moral choice/moral judgment confound, nevertheless, children have been shown to imitate more sophisticated moral judgments than their own (e.g., Turiel 1966) and less sophisticated moral judgments than their own (Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson 1969). However, the finding of the downward shift has been interpreted as a change in the child's surface responses to moral questions rather than a change in his/her preferred level of moral reasoning (Turiel 1969). Indeed, some evidence (e.g., Keasey 1973) suggests that the child's moral judgment level is resistant to any change caused by a brief exposure to a model since, to change moral judgment, the child must experience extensive cognitive reorganization according to cognitive-developmental theory.

While little relation has been found between moral judgment scores and moral behavior scores in children, a judgment-behavior linkage has emerged in socialization research. Punishment has been found to be a more effective deterent to rule-breaking behavior in children when it has been accompanied by a rationale for rule-following that is appropriate to the moral judgment level of the punished child (e.g., Cheyne 1972; LaVoie 1974). Other research has found a similar modifying influence of the child's moral judgment level on his/her susceptibility to being influenced by models with regard to simple choice behavior (Rothman 1976; Saltzstein 1972; Turiel & Rothman 1972). Brody and Henderson (1977) found that a model's use of a rationale for his stated moral choice/moral judgment was influential in causing six-year-olds to shift their responses to hypothetical moral dilemmas. The modifying influence of the precise level of justification stated by a model to support his actual or hypothetical moral behavior on the subsequent moral behavior of the observing child has yet to be adequately determined.

The present study was designed to address several important issues regarding the impact of models on the child's morality. First, it was predicted that the moral behavior and/or moral decision of the observing child would be influenced more by models using justifications (for their moral decisions) at a level concordant with that of the child than by models stating a justification more sophisticated than that typically used by the child. Second, the possible influence of the level of moral justification expressed by the model on the subsequent level of moral

judgment in the observing child was assessed. Finally, it was expected that, while the child's actual moral behavior and his subsequent moral choice regarding proper behavior in a similar though hypothetical situation would be related, no significant relationship need be found between the child's moral judgment level and the other two indices of morality.

Subjects were drawn from a population that has been shown to demonstrate little likelihood of mature (i.e., autonomous) moral thinking (e.g., Cowan, Langer, Heavenrich, & Nathanson 1969; Dorr & Fey 1974; LaVoie 1974; Piaget 1948). Thus, immature (i.e., realisitc) justifications were expected to be more consonant with the moral thinking of the sample and therefore be more likely to increase the influence of the model on the child's moral responses.

Method

Subjects

Subjects in this study were 72 males ages 67 to 90 months with a mean age of 79.3 months (SD=8.85 months). All were enrolled in public elementary schools in Charlotte, North Carolina. Subjects were predominately from middle-class homes and estimated to be of normal intelligence.

Treatment Conditions

The sample was randomly and evenly divided into four experimental treatment groups with all 18 subjects in each condition tested individually. In the experimental conditions, a televised adult model verbalized his responses to a hypothetical moral problem. The model advocated either deviation from a prohibition, or resistance to deviation from the prohibi-

tion. The model then provided reasoning for his choice in a morally mature fashion (i.e., reciprocity-based) or in an immature fashion (i.e., reward/punishment-based). The verbalizations of the model in the experimental conditions were as follows: 1. Morally-immature resisting model - "If I were alone in a room with a big bowl of candy sitting there, I would not eat any of the candy. I wouldn't eat any because if I did, I might get caught. And if I got caught, I would be punished. I don't want to get punished, so that is why I would not eat any candy, because I don't want to get punished." 2. Morally-immature deviating model - "If I were alone in a room with a big bowl of candy sitting there, I would eat some of the candy. I would eat some because if I did, it would taste good. I like candy, because it tastes good. So that is why I would eat some of the candy, because it tastes good." 3. Morally-mature resisting model - "If I were alone in a room with a big bowl of candy sitting there I would not eat any of the candy. I wouldn't eat any because if I did, it would be taking something that belonged to someone else. If the candy were mine, I wouldn't want anybody else to eat any. So that is why I wouldn't eat any candy, because it belongs to someone else." 4. Morally-mature deviating model - "If I were alone in a room with a big bowl of candy sitting there, I would eat some of the candy. I would eat some because even though it belonged to someone else, I don't think they would mind me eating some. I would not mind them eating some of my candy, so that is why I would eat some of the candy, because I would not mind someone else eating some of mine." Each modeling sequence lasted approximately thirty seconds.

Procedure

Subjects were led to the research trailer individually by the experimenter, a white male in his early twenties. Upon entering the trailer, the experimenter told the subject that he was to watch television and that the five toys on the table in front of him were not to be touched. The taped modeling sequence was presented, and repeated once to better insure each subject's attention to the tape. The experimenter then informed the subject that he, the experimenter, must leave for a while to get some materials from his car, and asked the subject to wait for him in the trailer. The experimenter then left, and surreptitiously entered the adjacent observation room, and recorded the subject's toy-touching behavior for eight minutes. The experimenter then re-entered and administered a moral judgment test and presented a hypothetical moral problem to the subject. Subjects who had seen either of the two deviating models were then shown a brief disclaimer sequence. The subject was then escorted back to his classroom.

Measures

Each subject's moral behavior (i.e., frequency of toy-touching, duration of toy-touching) was recorded. Moral judgment was assessed using a modified version of the Berg-Cross (1975) intentionality scale. With the dimension of moral judgment assessed in the children (intentionality) not the same dimension addressed by the models (reward/punishment or reciprocity), any results of the present study regarding the model's influence on moral judgment in observers could not be readily attributable to the short-term

imitation of surface verbal responses. Due to time constraints, four stories were used out of a possible sixteen. All four stories had the same theme, i.e., a boy knocking over paint cans in art class, either accidentally or out of malice, causing either large or small damage. Subjects were required to indicate how much punishment the story character deserved by pointing to a picture on a punishment scale. This scale consisted of pictures representing five levels of punishment, ranging from no punishment (score = 0) to much punishment (score = 4). The subject's moral judgment score consisted of the total punishment score assigned to the two stories involving intentional damage minus the total punishment score assigned to the two accidental damage stories.

Subjects were also asked a question regarding their response to a hypothetical moral problem. They were asked what they would do if they found a quarter on the front steps of their house. All subjects who gave scorable responses indicated they would attempt to return it to the owner (or take it to their parents) or they would keep it for themselves. Attempting to return the money was scored as a 1 and keeping it was scored as 0.

Results

A series of orthogonal planned a priori comparisons were used to determine the influence of the models on the subjects' moral behavior, moral choice, and level of moral judgment. Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed to determine the relationships between the dependent measures. All predictions were directional and one-

tail significance levels were used throughout.

To determine whether children were more responsive to models using immature justifications, the moral behavior and moral decision of subjects in the immature-resist condition was compared to that of subjects in the mature-resist condition. Boys exposed to the resisting model expressing the fear of punishment rationale touched the toys for less time ($t(68) = 1.64$, $p<.06$) but not less often ($t(68) = 1.30$, $p<.10$) than boys exposed to the resisting model stating the reciprocity rationale. In addition, boys in the immature-resist condition gave more "resisting" responses to the moral choice story than did boys in the mature-resist condition ($t(57) = 2.56$, $p<.01$).

In comparisons of subjects in the two deviating model conditions, boys in the immature-deviate condition did not touch the toys more than did boys in the mature-deviate condition. However, the boys in the former group did give more "deviant" responses to the hypothetical story than did the boys in the latter group ($t(57) = 1.92$, $p<.05$).

Regarding the influence of the model's level of moral judgment on the moral judgment of the observing children, it was found that the boys in the conditions involving immature modeled rationales did not significantly differ in moral judgment from boys in the mature model conditions, $t(68) = 1.32$, $p<.10$.

The two measures of moral behavior were highly correlated, $r=.706$, $p<.01$. The subjects' moral behavior was significantly correlated with their moral choice ($r= -.320$ for time deviating ($p<.01$), and $r = -.230$ for

number of deviations ($p<.05$)). Subjects who touched the toys were likely to say that they would keep the money that they hypothetically found. Moral judgment was independent of moral behavior ($r = .058$ for time deviating, and $r = .162$ for number of deviations) and was but marginally related to moral choice ($r = .194$, $p<.10$).

Discussion

The influence of a model on the moral responses of the observing child may depend, in part, on the level of justification used by the model to support his statement of moral choice. The modifying influence of the level of justification was especially noteworthy in the resisting model conditions where both moral behavior and moral choice were found to be affected. These findings demonstrate the importance of a convergence of cognitive-developmental and social learning considerations in the understanding morality in children.

The absence of a significant influence of the models' level of moral justification on the subsequent moral judgment levels of the children may be attributable in part to the different dimensions of morality discussed by models and assessed in children. The absence of the effect is also consistent with the hypothesis that substantive changes in children's levels of moral thinking depend on the child's developmental readiness to make a transition and or more prolonged and salient experiences than a brief exposure to a model.

The correlation between moral behavior and subsequent moral choice may have been due to 1) the child altering his verbal statement to fit his

earlier performance, 2) the influence of established moral choice over behavior, even though choice was assessed later, and/or 3) the impact of the models on both measures of morality. Since all subjects were exposed to models prior to the assessment of their moral behavior and moral choice, the reason for the relationship must remain speculative.

The absence of a significant correlation between the child's moral behavior and his subsequent moral judgment level lends further support to the proposition that, while the child's moral judgment level may modify his susceptibility to various kinds of social influence, the child's style of moral thinking is not a strong determinant of his moral behavior. The child's moral behavior again appears to be more a function of his learning history and the demands of the situation than a result of an internalized style of moral justification (Mischel & Mischel 1976).

The finding of only a marginal relationship between the child's moral choice and his moral judgment level is evidence that the two indices of morality were properly separated in the present study and, further, that future research must avoid confounding them and consider each an important and distinct focus for future investigation.

In sum, the present study clearly demonstrated the effects attributable to models espousing moral choices (i.e., hypothetical moral behavior) with moral justifications. Further, observing children discriminate between models based, in part, on the match between their perspective on morality and that presented by the model.

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Footnote

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TABLE 1

MEANS FOR DEPENDENT MEASURES (n=18)

MEASURE	Immature Resist	Mature Resist	Immature Deviate	Mature Deviate
Time Deviating (secs)	12.33	44.22	44.28	32.06
Number of Deviations	3.22	5.11	4.56	5.44
Level of Moral Judgment	-0.22	0.78	-0.17	0.44
Moral Choice	.86[a]	.46[b]	.39	.69[c]

Note a: n=14; b: n=13; c: n=16.